

**Homily – Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent  
Mass at St. Luke School – March 5, 2024**

*“Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good!”* (Rom 12:21).

Can you repeat that very loudly? *“Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good!”* Saint Paul wrote those words to teach us what Jesus expects from us. Indeed, Jesus has overcome evil with good. During Lent, we prepare to partake in the Lord’s victory over evil.

Lent is the time to tidy up our hearts. It is the best time to get rid of old stuff in our souls. Lent is the time to prepare for Jesus to come to us and bring us new life. Resentment is like very stuck-on dirt. It is very difficult to clean, so it is best not to allow it to build up. That is why, in the gospel, we heard Jesus teach Peter a tough lesson about forgiveness.

Thousands of years ago, it was the law of the strongest. When someone thought they had been attacked, they would fight back. Whoever was right didn’t always win. Rather, the winner was the strongest. Then, the law of retaliation was introduced, which means *“eye for eye, tooth for tooth.”* (Ex 21:24). If you take out my eye, I will take out one of yours. If I break your tooth, you break one of mine. It is the best way for both you and I to end up eyeless and toothless.

What Jesus taught revolutionized the world. Peter thought he got it, but not quite. He asks the Lord, *“Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?”* The number seven symbolizes completion or perfection. So, Peter is basically saying: “Lord, if someone offends me, I have to forgive them always; right?” What Jesus responds means: “Not only always, but ALWAYS, ALWAYS”. In other words, there is no wiggle room for resentment. Not at all! That is the only way we can sincerely pray, in the Our Father, *“forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”*

But, how is that even possible? A little later in the same gospel, the disciples were astonished at the demands of Jesus to enter the kingdom of God. *“Who then can be saved?”* they asked. *“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.’”* (Mt 19:26). This means we need God’s help to clean up our hearts, especially if we have any stuck-up dirt. We need to pray for help.

In our first reading, we heard about Azariah’s prayer. Azariah, along with his two companions, refused to worship false gods. The king became furious and ordered them to be thrown into the fire. From there, Azariah sang the prayer that we heard: *“with contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received...”* He prays for God’s mercy!

On the cross, Jesus set the most perfect example. After being betrayed, abandoned, scourged, and crucified, the Lord cried out to the Father: *“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”* (Lk 23:34). On the third day, He rose again. Instead of claiming vengeance, He gave his disciples power to forgive sins.

So, let us prepare well for Easter, through prayer, fasting and the most important form of almsgiving: forgiveness. On Easter Sunday we will sing: *“Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous: / The Prince of life, who died, reigns immortal. / (...) Christ indeed / from death is risen, / our new life obtaining.”* Pope Francis has referred to this prayer called the Sequence, saying, *“Yes, dear brothers and sisters, he who has triumphed is at our side! Christ has conquered! He has conquered death! Let us renew the hope that life will triumph!”*

Our Lady of Guadalupe, renew our hope through forgiveness. Help us forgive always, always!